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ABSTRACT

Minicourse 2, "Thought and Language: Skills for Teaching Kindergarten Children With Minimal Language Experience," was designed to help teachers to meet the needs of such pupils. The course is organized into five sequences in which a set of 14 teaching behaviors are described and demonstrated; specific skills pertain to five areas of language development: extending phrases to complete sentences and refining meanings; establishing and using new language patterns; using language to describe position, to describe and classify objects, and to identify and describe action. The main field test involved 47 kindergarten teachers, and children were from black, migrant white, and Mexican-American communities. The course evaluation involved analysis by trained evaluators of videotaped samples of each teacher's behavior (four 10-minute lessons--each taught to five different pupils--before and after the course). The Wilcoxon T was used in determining the statistical significance of behavior changes. Findings indicated significant positive change in most of the 14 skills. Teachers indicated that the instructional tapes were the most important feature of the course and agreed that the model lesscns and Teachers Handbook were useful for the specific suggestions for use in the microteaching lessons. The course underwent operational field testing in 1969 and is expected to be ready for commercial distribution by mid-1970. (Course outline and specific finding are included.) (JS)

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# TEACHER BEHAVIORS THAT IMPROVE THE PUPIL'S USE OF LANGUAGE

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# TEACHER BEHAVIORS THAT IMPROVE THE PUPIL'S USE OF LANGUAGE*

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## MINICOURSE 2: THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE: SKILLS FOR TEACHING KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN WITH MINIMAL LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

### Basic Principles

Minicourse 2 was developed in response to an increasing concern for children who enter school with a minimal language background. Many of these children come from restricted environments in which language is used primarily to convey concrete needs and immediate consequences, not concepts and relationships (Bernstein, 1961). Unfortunately, minimal language development is a deterrent to success in the public schools. Here the child may find himself in a system which stresses communication skills and which does not adequately provide for the student who is below the assumed beginning level. Minicourse 2 is intended to help the teacher meet the needs of such pupils.

The course was designed with four basic principles in mind. First, children will learn new language if they feel a need for the language (Vygotsky, 1962). This need can be stimulated through interesting situations which encourage children to talk and share ideas. Second, children learn language best when it is associated with something that they already know or with something they can see and feel. Third,

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children will learn new language best through verbal interaction with verbally mature speakers (John and Goldstein, 1964). For this reason, Minicourse 2 emphasizes the technique of small-group instruction. The advantages of this technique are that it allows the teachers to model language, and it provides pupils with many opportunities to use the modeled language. Fourth, language and thought are interdependent, and should therefore be learned together. For example, it cannot be expected that a child will use words denoting classification and comparison if he does not know how to sort objects on the basis of their common characteristics. The course emphasizes learning situations which provide the child with opportunities for such experiences.

## Goal and Scope of the Course

The goal of Minicourse 2 is to develop teaching skills that lead to the acquisition of language by kindergarten children who come to school with a minimal language background. The specific teaching skills pertain to the following areas of language development:

1. Extending phrases to complete sentences, and refining meaning.
2. Establishing and using new language patterns.
3. Using language to describe position.
4. Using language to describe and classify objects.
5. Using language to identify and describe action.

To develop teachers' skills in each of these areas, the course is organized into five sequences in which a set of fourteen teaching behaviors are described and demonstrated. The course sequence and behaviors are presented in Table 1. Complete results of the main field test are represented in

Table 2.

The objective of the first instructional sequence is to increase teachers' use of behaviors which will help children to develop more completely the flexibility, complexity, and precision of their language. The two specific teaching behaviors are: (1) Extending a phrase to a sentence, and (2) refining meaning by providing the child with a word that accurately describes an object or situation. The language skills toward which these teacher behaviors are directed are found more frequently in the pre-school background of the middle-class child than in the background of disadvantaged children, where adult-child interaction is often limited. The language of kindergarten children who enter school with minimal language experience is characterized by such deficiencies as (1) use of short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences; (2) rigid and limited use of adjectives and adverbs; (3) little use of subordinate clauses; and (4) simple and repetitive use of conjunctions such as "so," "then," "and," "because" (Bernstein, 1961).

Actually, teachers have many opportunities to extend and refine language throughout the school day. When a child says "over there," the teacher can extend the pupil's phrase by saying, "Yes, the book is on the table by the window." When a child says, "It's bumpy," the teacher can refine meaning by saying, "Yes, the cloth is rough." If in describing a model car a child says, "It got two round things," the teacher can reply, "Yes, the car has two round headlights."

The second instructional sequence has as its objective the development of teaching skills that can be used to introduce and provide practice

in (1) modeling a language pattern in context and, if possible, in conjunction with specific objects; (2) eliciting the language pattern from pupils; and (3) praising in specific terms, omitting the personal element. This third teaching skill, the use of praise to reinforce desired behavior, is one that every teacher recognizes as important. However, even though teachers use praise regularly, two aspects of this technique are often neglected. Teachers should provide praise that is specific rather than general, and should avoid over-use of the personal referent "I." Specific as compared to general praise provides better feedback. Teachers often will praise pupils in such terms as "very good," "right," "fine," "excellent," etc. However, none of these phrases designates precisely what the child did that was "very good" or "fine." When a teacher says, "Very good, you remembered to use our new word, 'vehicle,'" the child knows the precise reason he is being praised. In addition, other children hear the praise statements, and are consequently more likely to employ the behavior that received praise. The second aspect of such praise is a little more subtle in its consequences. Although children like to please their teachers, it is better to direct the child toward an appraisal of his accomplishments rather than simply impress him with the knowledge that the teacher is pleased. Rather than say, "I like your description of the fish," the teacher could say, "Good, you observed and told us the difference in color and size of the fish." The latter statement focuses more sharply on the child's contribution.

The objective of the third instructional sequence is to develop teaching skills that facilitate the child's learning and use of positional words.[1] The sequence leads teachers to do the following: (1) introduce

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[1]Positional words are defined as prepositions that denote position, e.g., "on," "above,""over."

specific positional words in context and in conjunction with objects; (2) provide varied physical experiences to assure pupil comprehension of positional words; and (3) elicit use of positional words. It has been found that children with minimal language backgrounds show some uncertainty about the properties of positional words (Bernstein, 1961). Each form of a prepositional word may have several meanings; conversely each position may be described by several forms. For example, the phrase "over there" may mean any of the following: "in the corner," "on the second shelf," "with the other toys," etc. If we analyze all of these various meanings, we find that "in the corner" implies awareness of lines and angles; "on the second shelf" implies sequential ordering; and "with the other toys" shows an awareness of similarity between objects. It seems likely that the child who uses the unexplicit positional phrase "over there" for all of these positions lacks explicit awareness of these varied characteristics of the external environment and his relation to it. Through language training the teacher can evaluate and develop this awareness.

The objective of the fourth instructional sequence is to provide teachers with a set of skills that develop the ability of children to observe, classify and describe objects. The specific teaching skills are (1) eliciting observations of objects; (2) eliciting observations of similarities and differences between and within groups; and (3) providing language patterns for making comparisons. These teaching skills are necessary since the young child tends to order his environment in one of two ways. First, he may over-generalize; for example, all fuzzy things may be called "doggy." Unfortunately, most parents correct this error by saying simply, "No, this is a kitty," without providing additional

information. Usually the child gets a sufficient number of opportunities to compare "doggies" with "kitties" and eventually gets the idea that certain fuzzy creatures are called cats and others are called dogs. However, this is a fairly inefficient process. He would need far fewer examples if he were given the necessary information to make the distinction. In addition to over-generalizing, a child may also fail to make generalizations when appropriate. For example, he may perceive the dining room table as an entirely different sort of object from the end table in the front room. As in the case of the over-generalization problem discussed above, he must be shown those critical characteristics common to "tables" so that he recognizes and says "table" appropriately.

The fifth instructional sequence demonstrates teaching skills that lead to greater facility by pupils in describing and identifying action. The three teaching skills are: (1) verbally describing an action in conjunction with a demonstration of it; (2) introducing other actions that illustrate the verb; and (3) eliciting use of the modeled verbs. Research indicates that pupils from minimal language backgrounds have difficulty using "action" words to describe an action (John & Goldstein, 1964). The child's limited vocabulary does not necessarily mean that the child is deficient in experience with the "action" referent; he may have tied and untied many strings and "poured" a large number of liquids. However, if he has received little or no assistance in attaching the verbal labels "tie" and "pour" to these physical activities, he may be unable to communicate verbally what he is doing. This problem is exemplified by occasions when a child with minimal language skills will "show" the teacher what has

happened rather than "tell" her. For example, when the teacher in one kindergarten classroom asked the children what the bus driver did when it started to rain, the children all moved their arms to represent the motions of a wildshield wiper. The children were aware of the physical action of the wipers, but had no verbal label to describe the action.

## Main Field Test

Sample: The main field test of Minicourse 2 was conducted in two California communities and one in Pennsylvania. In one California community, the classes were composed of children from both black and migrant white communities. In the other, the classes were primarily Mexican-American. The pupil population in the Pennsylvania community was urban black.

Forty-seven kindergarten teachers participated in the main field test. The average teacher had nearly 9 years experience with 3 years experience at the kindergarten level. The age range was between 30 and 40 years, and most of the teachers held either a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree. Three held the Master of Arts degrees and one had a normal school diploma.

Design: The course evaluation involved pre- and post-course measurement of teacher performance in the fourteen teaching skills, as well as pupil gains in language, based on analysis of videotaped samples of each teacher's behavior. Additional information was collected through questionnaires concerning teacher attitudes toward the course and the reactions of the principals in the participating schools.

Before the course began, an orientation meeting was held in each school district. It was explained that the pre-course taping would reveal

the extent to which teachers already used the behaviors, and that the post-course tapes would help us determine how successful Minicourse 2 had been in increasing the use of these behaviors. Teachers were requested to prepare and teach four ten-minute lessons, teaching each lesson to five different pupils.

The videotapes were transcribed and the protocols subsequently analyzed by trained evaluators. When the behavior included a physical, as well as a verbal, action the videotapes were viewed to determine how the skill had been demonstrated by the teacher. The fourth ten-minute lesson was expected to provide scores on modeling and eliciting language patterns. The instructions were not sufficiently specific, however, and it was therefore not possible to obtain scores on the two skills in Instructional Sequence Two that were concerned with language patterns.

Main Field Test Results

Table 2 presents the data for the twelve skills evaluated in the main field test of Minicourse 2. The statistical significance of changes in teacher behavior on the pre- and post-course tapes was determined using the Wilcoxon T (Siegel, 1956). This nonparametric test of statistical significance was chosen since the scores for many of the variables had skewed distributions. Horizontal lines have been used to divide the behaviors within each instructional sequence, starting with Instructional Sequence 1.

Instructional Sequence 1: The average teacher increased her use of extension of phrases to sentences by 60%, from 4.04 to 6.47 times during a ten-minute lesson. Instances of refining meaning rose from an average of .95 to an average of 2.39. The marked increase in these teacher skills

is important because extending and refining language places the teaching emphasis upon cognitive development and syntax, rather than on correction of poor pronunciation and grammar, or inappropriate slang and dialect. Once a teacher has mastered the techniques of refining and extending language, she can use them throughout the day to provide the language-deprived child with the type of speech model he needs.

Instructional Sequence 2: Teachers showed a significant change in the type of praise used. General praise remained unchanged; however, there was a significant increase in the use of specific praise. By using specific praise, the teachers were now in a position to provide the kind of positive feedback essential to langauge development. As we pointed out above, it was not possible to score the other two teachers skills covered in this sequence.

Instructional Sequence 3: Before the course teachers attempted relatively little modeling of specific positional words in context. After the course, teacher modeling increased significantly. The importance of this change cannot be over-emphasized. The ambiguity of positional words makes it essential that the child with minimal language have many concrete examples of these words and their varied meanings.

The second teaching skill in this instructional sequence attempts to lead teachers to provide the child with a physical experience to establish the meaning of a positional word. Interestingly enough, this teacher behavior decreased. Further analysis of the data, however, indicated that the teachers were encouraging pupils to provide each other with the physical experiences. Instead of the teacher giving directions, pupils asked each other to place an object in a particular place. This change

in teacher behavior brought about an important increase in pupil participation.

The final teacher behavior in the sequence--eliciting the use of positional words by the child--did not change. On the pre-course tape teachers elicited the use of positional words almost exclusively by asking a question such as, "Tell me where the red car is." After the course, children were asked to give one another directions. In addition, teachers requested children to repeat modeled sentences. This increased pupil participation is important since it provides the child with much needed practice.

Instructional Sequence 4: The first skill deals with eliciting observations of objects. As teachers give children opportunities to see and describe characteristics of objects, they tend to ask for specific attributes. "Tell me about the size" and "What is the color?" are typical requests. Teachers used this form of eliciting observations in about the same quantity before as after the course. A different procedure demonstrated in this sequence is that of first eliciting observations with general questions that do not direct the child's thinking. An example of such a question is, "Tell me all about your object." Before the course teachers used virtually no open-ended questions; after the course this approach was used an average of about one-and-one-half times in ten minutes.

Pupils' responses to open-ended or general questions have different characteristics than responses to specific questions. An analysis of teacher questions and pupil answers on the post-course videotapes showed that when a teacher said, "Tell me about your object," she got an average of 1.5 attributes and a three-and-one-half word response. When she asked for color, shape or any single attribute she got a one-attribute, one-word

reply. It can be hypothesized that when children have extended practice in responding to open-ended questions, their observations would continue to increase and so would the length of the response.

The second teacher skill, eliciting observations of similarities and differences between and within groups, was one on which the teachers made a substantial change. On the average, teachers increased their use of this technique by nearly 80%. Not only does this teaching behavior develop pupils' language skills, but it also increases pupils' ability to perceive similarities and differences between objects in their environment.

The third teacher skill, providing language patterns for expressing comparisons, gives students a model for verbalizing similarities and differences between objects. Before the course, teachers made little use of this technique. After the course, they modeled language patterns for expressing comparisons an average of over seven times in a ten-minute lesson.

Instructional Sequence 5: Occurrences of the first skill--verbalizing action in context--increased from an average of 3.85 to 5.28. The second skill--introducing other actions that illustrate the verb--also increased significantly. This increase is another indication that many teachers did not systematically plan language experiences before the course. The third teacher behavior--eliciting the use of the modeled verb--gives the child practice in using an action word. Before the course, teachers elicited action words an average of about 12 times. After the course, occurrences of this behavior increased to 18 times in a ten-minute lesson; this represents a 50 per cent gain.

Questionnaire Data

Besides the pre-course and post-course videotape recordings, each teacher was administered an open-ended questionnaire concerning her reactions to Minicourse 2. The vast majority of teachers indicated that the instructional tapes were the most important feature of the course. They agreed that the model lessons and the Teachers Handbook were helpful because they gave specific suggestions. About half the teachers used the sample lessons in the handbook to plan their microteaching lessons, while the others made up their own. The lesson plan forms were recognized as a good planning device.

About 75 per cent of the teachers said they had never held small group lessons for the purpose of developing their pupils' language skills. This finding would seem to reflect a serious lack in the kindergarten curriculum since the pupil language deficiencies around which this course was designed are well known and documented in the literature. There also seemed to be a serious classroom organization problem since small group teaching appeared to be a relatively infrequent practice. To overcome this organizational weakness, the Laboratory's Teacher Education Program developed Minicourse 8, "Organizing the Kindergarten Classroom for Independent Learning and Small Group Instruction."

Present Status

Minicourse 2 underwent its operational field test during the fall of 1969. It is expected that this course will be ready for commercial distribution by mid-1970.

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Table 1

OBJECTIVES AND SPECIFIC SKILLS COVERED IN MINICOURSE 2

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE I

OBJECTIVE: To develop teacher skills useful for extending the language and thought of kindergarten children.

TEACHING SKILLS:
1. Extend a phrase to a sentence.
2. Refine meaning by providing a word that accurately describes the object or situation.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE II

OBJECTIVE: To develop teaching skills that introduce and provide practice in the use of new language patterns.

TEACHING SKILLS:
1. Model a language pattern in context and if possible in conjunction with objects.
2. Elicit the language pattern from the pupils.
3. Praise in specific terms, omitting the personal element.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE III

OBJECTIVE: To develop teaching skills that facilitate children's learning of positional words.

TEACHING SKILLS:
1. Model specific positional words in context and in conjunction with concrete objects.
2. Provide varied physical experiences to assure pupil comprehension of positional words.
3. Elicit positional words from pupils.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE IV

OBJECTIVE: To develop teaching skills which increase children's ability to describe and classify objects.

TEACHING SKILLS:

1. Elicit observations of objects.
2. Elicit observations of similarities and differences between and within groups of objects.
3. Provide language patterns for expressing comparisons.

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE V

OBJECTIVE: To develop teaching skills that increase children's ability to identify and describe action.

TEACHING SKILLS:

1. Verbalize a motor activity in conjunction with a demonstration.
2. Model several verbs that identify action.
3. Elicit the use of modeled verbs from the children.

Table 2

Minicourse 2

MAIN FIELD TEST DATA

| Behavior | Pre-Course Mean | Post-Course Mean | Sign Changes + | o | - | z |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE I | | | | | | |
| 1. Extend phrases to sentences | 4.04 | 6.47 | 35 | 2 | 10 | 3.27*** |
| 2. Refine meaning | .95 | 2.39 | 25 | 16 | 6 | 2.85** |
| INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE II | | | | | | |
| 3. Specific praise omitting pronoun "I" | .60 | 2.10 | 30 | 11 | 6 | 3.26*** |
| 4. General praise | 8.72 | 8.15 | 23 | 9 | 15 | .88 |
| INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE III | | | | | | |
| 5. Model specific positional words in context with demonstration | 3.45 | 4.78 | 32 | 0 | 8 | 4.29*** |
| 6. Provide physical experiences to develop comprehension | 11.79 | 8.77 | 18 | 1 | 21 | 1.81* |
| 7. Elicit positional word from child | 17.30 | 17.63 | 20 | 0 | 20 | .00 |
| INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE IV | | | | | | |
| 8. Elicit observations of objects | 5.38 | 5.37 | 13 | 24 | 11 | .51 |
| 9. Elicit observations of similarities and differences | 10.49 | 18.72 | 38 | 1 | 8 | 4.16*** |
| 10. Provide language patterns for expressing comparisons | 2.92 | 7.69 | 38 | 2 | 7 | 4.64*** |
| INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE V | | | | | | |
| 11. Verbalizing action in context | 3.85 | 5.28 | 27 | 9 | 11 | 2.59** |
| 12. Introduce other actions that illustrate the verb | .11 | 2.02 | 27 | 18 | 2 | 4.49*** |
| 13. Elicit use of modeled verb | 12.57 | 18.30 | 32 | 1 | 14 | 3.41*** |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .005$
*** $p < .001$